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A SERIOUS

EXHORTATION

TO THE

ELECTORS

OF

GREAT BRITAIN.

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A SERIES

EXHIBITION

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EXHIBITION



ORDER AT BRITAIN

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TO THE
ELECTORS
OF
GREAT BRITAIN.

FRIENDS AND COUNTRYMEN,

WERE I inclined to avail myself of the confusion of the moment, the more effectually to promote the designs of a faction, I would adopt the style of the many who have already addressed you on the present occasion; I would endeavour to mislead your judgments by the delusions of sophistry, or to inflame your minds by the violence of declamation.

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But

But wholly unconnected with party, uninfluenced by the views of private advantage, your interests alone can induce me to claim your attention to those particulars, which appear most immediately to challenge it.—For such a purpose, the language of simplicity and truth is best calculated; it will best enable you to judge of the sincerity of my motives, and to determine upon the real importance of the subject.

Were I, for a moment, to dwell upon the boasted pre-eminence of your constitution, were I to take up your time, by adverting to those duties, a strict and faithful fulfilment of which is essential to the preservation of that constitution, I might reasonably be charged with doubting, at once, your knowledge of its principles, and your zeal to assert and vindicate them.

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But,

But, as I dare not for a moment entertain so injurious a suspicion, I will not even touch upon those subjects, but content myself with observing, that the present period affords you an opportunity to correct those evils, which corruption or faction may have introduced into your government; and also, to prescribe means for providing, as far as human wisdom can provide, against them in future.

Permit me, however, before I enter minutely into the discussion of those evils, which appear to me most immediately to demand your interposition, to congratulate you, that, from the Throne itself, that interposition has been expressly required. The Sovereign has been advised to state, as a reason for the present dissolution, a wish to inform himself of your senti-

ments on those points, which have of late so greatly agitated the political circle. Here, I were wanting in candor, were I not to observe, what cannot but have already suggested itself to your minds, that this language from the Throne, recognizing the propriety of referring to the great body of the nation, upon any extraordinary emergence, was, for the first time in the present reign, recognized in the Administration of that very Minister, from whom your late representatives thought proper to withhold their confidence, assigning, as the motive of their conduct, a suspicion of his constitutional integrity.

From this circumstance, the present appeal to your sentiments must appear, not one of those ordinary revolutions, intended to afford you an opportunity

opportunity of correcting, or confirming your former choice in your representation; but one of those solemn appeals, where you are referred to as most capable, and best entitled to pronounce upon a grand constitutional question, involving, in its decision, your own constitutional rights. To be insensible or indifferent to the issue of such an appeal, were nothing less than to betray yourselves, your posterity, your country—it were to bow at the shrine of despotism, and, with sacrilegious hand, to make an offering of your liberties! To rouse to action those torpid minds, who for years have viewed that glorious fabric of antiquity, the constitution of England, tottering over their heads, without even extending a saving arm to uphold it, is indeed impossible; but of such, I

trust,

trust, there are but few amongst you; and in that confidence consists my only hope. Whether I am warranted in sanguinely presuming the enthusiastic glow of liberty still to pervade the minds of my countrymen, the present crisis must determine; it is with themselves to declare, whether the freedom of their constitution is worth the care of preserving, or whether they feel themselves disposed to do away that invidious distinction between their government, and those of other countries, by levelling that glorious superstructure, founded on the spirit, and reared by the wisdom, of their patriot ancestors, to the common standard of liberty, the *monarch's nod*. Such is the serious importance of the present crisis; but lest those who view with evil eye this appeal made to your judgments,

judgments, should take occasion to charge me with hazarding assertions unsupported by proof, I will enter more minutely into the merits of the question in the late House of Commons; I will adduce arguments to prove the issue to be what I have stated it to be, whether we shall continue a free nation, or degenerately prostrate ourselves at the tyrant's feet. And here, my fellow citizens, let me observe, as one equally with yourselves interested in all the calamities which may await you, that, of every species of tyranny, (and tyranny can assume a variety of appearances) that is the most to be dreaded, which owes its rise to the licentiousness of a nation.

The great question, which has for some weeks past engaged the attention of every mind anxious for the welfare

welfare of his country, is, Whether the House of Commons is constitutionally entitled to a negative in the appointment of a Minister? It were to trespass too much on your indulgence, to enter at large into the merits of this question; the greatest abilities having discussed it with a perspicuity and solidity of reasoning, which cannot but have carried conviction to the minds of all inclined to receive it. I will, therefore, confine myself to the answering of those objections, which have been taken to the statement and conclusions of those, who assert the constitution to have invested *neither* House of Parliament with such right. They who contend in favour of the claim made by the House of Commons, insist, that in claiming a negative, they do not *consequently* claim the

the right of appointment. Whether their claim does or does not involve in its *consequence*, the right of appointment, let a reference to the express and repeated assertions of those, who were considered to speak the sense of a majority of that House, determine. Did they not repeatedly declare, (indeed, a resolution of the same tendency, at this moment, stains the journals of their House,) That the present Minister was not entitled to the confidence of that House, for that he came into power by unconstitutional means? that is, that he succeeded an Administration, which, they contended, were dismissed from office, by the exercise of an unconstitutional influence. Nay, did they not over and over again assert, in so many words, that they had no other objection to the Administra-

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tion

tion of Mr. Pitt, but his mode of coming into office? To do away which offence, his resignation was insisted upon as a preliminary. He must resign, and things stand as they did before their dismissal, or he be contented to forego the confidence of that House. Was not this demanding to be restored to office? was it not assuming to themselves, at least, the privilege of determining what cause should warrant the dismissal of a Minister? I will not investigate the charge against a Noble Peer, as the author of that unconstitutional influence. It were to insult the understanding of the least informed, to set about proving the influence alluded to, to be in no respect exceptionable. Mr. Pitt, however, ought not to be Minister, in the opinion of a majority of your late representatives,

sentatives,—for that such influence had induced his appointment. The objection was not personal; it was not merely an objection to the character of Mr. Pitt; the objection was equally applicable to any person in the three kingdoms, except to those who had been dismissed in consequence of that influence. The Duke of Portland, Lord North, and Mr. Fox, were the only persons against whose Administration the same objection would not have equally applied. To what did this amount short of an avowed intention to force into the councils of the Sovereign such persons as that House might be pleased to nominate? All that was necessary to save appearances, (and the saving of appearances was as much as that House appeared to have in contemplation,) was to declare their

disapprobation of the dismissal of any administration; then to resolve the succeeding one to be unworthy their confidence; and thus obtrude upon the Sovereign, whatever Ministry they might be pleased to prescribe. In other words, all that was necessary was, first to assert a negative in the dismissal, in order to warrant an affirmative in the appointment. Could they have established this doctrine as constitutional, they had effectually secured to themselves, what has long been the sole object of their politics—the administration of public affairs for life—the object which pervades that infamous India Bill—and proposed to be effected by means of the patronage it would have afforded them: that effort was, however, baffled, by the ever-memorable glorious exertion of Aristocratic

cratic patriotism. 'Tis for yourselves to counteract the views of the present.

This, my fellow citizens, may serve to prove, what I set out with asserting, that the House of Commons exercising a negative, must inevitably, whenever they thought fit, have possessed them of an affirmative, in the appointment of a Minister. I will now endeavour to shew how extremely dangerous it had been to the liberties of the subject, had they succeeded in their design.

You must all know, that however admirable is our constitution, its advantages are solely deriveable from an equilibrium being strictly preserved between the constituent parts of our government. It were much to endanger that equilibrium, were the Commons possessed of a controlling voice in the appointment of a Minister,

ter, independent of the ^{other} two branches of the ^{legislative} ~~legislation~~; for as our constitution now stands, the Lords are equally entitled with the Commons to address the Sovereign, to remove a Minister from his councils. The Sovereign is bound to regard the advice and remonstrance of his Peers, equally with the advice and remonstrance of his Commons. But if the doctrine now contended for is to prevail, and the Minister is appointed upon the Commons giving the Sovereign to understand, that to no other will they afford their confidence; should the Lords think proper to approach the Throne, praying a dismissal of the Minister, how is the Sovereign to act? To comply, would be construed flying in the face of the commons; and to retain the minister, would be treating the Lords with exactly

actly the same indignity, lately so vehemently complained of, and resented by the Commons. Unless then, the Lords, are not, entitled to address the Throne for a removal of Ministers, or to expect the same benignity of compliance from their Sovereign, which the Commons, in the present case, so loudly demand, the Lords would be warranted to exercise those means, which they enjoy equally with the Commons, of impeding the progress of public affairs, and, by imitating their late procrastinating conduct, expose the nation to a thousand inconveniencies, for the purpose of vindicating that which they deemed a right in themselves, in common with the other House of Parliament.

The only alternative, under such circumstances, would be, for the Commons to adopt the violence of the last century,

century, to vote the Peers an useless body, and to give to their own declaration the force of law ; thus to destroy that equilibrium, without which the principles of our constitution, however founded on wisdom and public liberty, can avail the subject in no particular whatever ; but must leave him exposed to all those calamities which were experienced by our ancestors, and which must inevitably result from tyranny, founded on anarchy and licentiousness. Hence, my fellow citizens, it appears, that you cannot possess your representatives of a negative in the appointment of a Minister, without at once divesting the Crown of its hitherto acknowledged prerogative, and the Lords of an unquestionable privilege,—the right of addressing their Sovereign to dismiss the Minister. But
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the violation of the prerogative of the Sovereign, and abrogation of the privilege of the Lords, is not the whole of the sacrifice demanded by the Commons ; their requisition included much more, it included one of the most valuable of your own privileges ; for the right of addressing the Sovereign for the removal of his Minister, is the privilege of the meanest subject of the realm ; this privilege must fall also a victim to the views of ambition and avarice ; to gratify those views you must henceforth be contented with the government of whomsoever a majority of the House of Commons, however abandoned, however void of principle that majority might be, should think fit to declare the only persons in whom they would ~~would~~ confide. The chains which corruption might forge, you

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must

must have worn without repining or complaint.

If you are told that it was never intended to deprive you of the right of addressing, let those who profer such consolation shew with what prospect of success you could have exercised it. The Sovereign's situation compelling him to a strict compliance with the resolutions of the Commons, you might have approached the Throne day after day with no other advantage than to witness the first magistrate groaning under the same unconstitutional oppression with yourselves. This had been your only consolation, if consolation it may be termed, had the demand of the late House of Commons been acquiesced in as constitutional doctrine.

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Under such circumstances, it remains with your own good sense and patriotism to determine how far it is worthy of you to new model your constitution, to destroy that equilibrium, which has hitherto secured to you the blessings of a free government, merely to gratify the inordinate ambition of one of yourselves, one whom you have made choice of to preserve that equilibrium, one whom you returned to Parliament, to check, avert, and defeat every design that might endanger it ; to suggest, promote, and adopt every mean that might more effectually secure it. If, to gratify the ambition of such an one, you are prepared yourselves to encounter all ^{the} calamities which usually attend ~~ed~~ innovations on a constitution of government, reflect that you are not the only

persons interested in your conduct, that on this very occasion, you are called upon to exercise the most invaluable privilege of suffrage, not merely in your own right, but as trustees for no less than two millions of your countrymen, and of nearly seven millions of women and children, all of whom must participate with you, their authors, those evils which must necessarily follow your neglecting, on the present most solemn appeal to your judgments and integrity, to assert and vindicate the principles of our constitution.

This brings me to the consideration of the means, by which, in future, those dissensions, which have lately distracted the state, may be most effectually prevented. The occasion now offers itself, in a shape peculiarly inviting ;

viting; it comes sanctioned by the wish of the Sovereign; to assert that right of dictating to your representatives, which some of them have dared to question. You are now called upon to return to the next Parliament persons possessed of your sentiments, and determined to give them effect. And can there be a mean more likely to preserve a good understanding, between you and the democratic branch of your government, than by reserving to yourselves the right of control? The mischiefs which now ensue, from a contrariety of opinion between the representative and the constituent, would be effectually provided against; and the House of Commons might be truly termed the representatives of their electors. But can any thing be more absurd than the doctrine of the present day;

day ; that the representative, when chosen, is instantly free to act independent of the wishes or controul of those, for the purpose of giving effect to whose wishes he was chosen. The proposition involves in its very terms a solecism ; not less absurd is it to deem a representative independent of his constituent, than to contend an agent to be independent of his principal. The House of Commons are the mere agents of the real body of electors ; they are intended to effect what, in a ^{perfect} ~~free~~ democracy, would be effected by the collective voice of the people, and are consequently bound to regulate their conduct by the popular opinion, whenever such opinion is declared, as directory of their conduct. It were to insult the understandings of my fellow citizens and countrymen,

were

were I to dwell for a moment on the absurdity of the prevailing opinion in the late Parliament, that the voice of the people can only be collected from the sense of their representative body; and that their representative body are neither bound to regard, individually the advice of their constituents, or the general voice of the nation. Yet, monstrous as is this doctrine, it met with an advocate in that very man, who raised himself to importance in the political world, more by the implicit confidence reposed by you in his professions, than even by his own unrivalled abilities; in this very man, to whom the friends of liberty looked up as to the favour of their rights, those who have been long endeavouring to lessen your consequence in the political scale, found a most daring champion. But be not deterred

deterred from a vindication of your rights, though a Goliath stalk in the front of the phalanx confederated against them. A David may be found among you, perhaps not equal in strength, but more favoured from above; the righteousness of his cause may inspire him with courage to attempt, what chance may crown with the long wished-for success.

Should I have been fortunate enough to convince my fellow citizens of the necessity of their asserting this right; they will, I trust, readily imitate the example set ~~before~~ them by the citizens of London, of requiring of all those, who aspire to the honour of representing them in Parliament, to subscribe ~~freely~~ to those conditions which the nature of their trust implies; implicit compliance with the wishes
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and directions of their constituents, or resignation. The latter alternative affords what it is highly reasonable every man should enjoy, an option in his conduct; no one can complain that he is thereby subjected to the disgraceful reproaches of his conscience, by being compelled to act, in a manner, at variance with conviction. The alternative offers itself; and he may avail himself of it. He admits the conditions of his trust, and he is merely called upon to perform them. This is the nature of that test proposed by the city of London to its members. This is that test which, from its moderation and wisdom, is well entitled to the adoption of every other County, City, or Borough, in the kingdom. Nor let it be rejected as a novelty, or innovation on the privileges or duties of the representative.

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Let my fellow citizens and countrymen be apprized, that it is sanctioned by precedents *, drawn from that period of our constitution, whence the duty of a representative may be most conclusively collected. There are instances, furnished by the infancy of our House of Commons, of the representative, upon application made for his concurrence to any new device, answering, that he dare not give it, till he had consulted with his constituents thereon. Hence the duty of the representative obviously appears to have been considered, in those days, no other than that of declaring the sentiments of his constituents; and to refer to them for their sentiments, on every new and extraordinary emergency. But so much strictness is not

* 4 Is.¹⁴. 34.

now required; all that is expected from
 the representative is, to act in confor-
 mity to the wishes of his constituents,
 when those wishes are expressly com-
 municated to him, as the channel
 through which they must derive effect,
 leaving him the option of compliance,
 or resignation of his trust. So reason-
 able appears to me this requisition, so
 admirably calculated to strengthen the
 bulwarks of liberty, that I am per-
 suaded, unless the arts of faction have
 triumphed over the honest exertions
 of patriotism, or my fellow citizens
 have lost all concern for their political
 interests, that this test, prescribed by
 the metropolis to their representatives,
 will be adopted, as a means of pre-
 serving the heavenly flame of liberty,
 which used to burn so pure in the
 breasts of our ancestors, by all such

electors, upon whose minds still beams its refulgent ray. By it, they immediately vindicate their own rights ; by it, they may be hereafter enabled to vindicate the rights of those of their fellow citizens, who are now shamefully refused, on an occasion like the present, to declare, by the exercise of their suffrage, their sentiments on a question in the decision of which they are so seriously interested. Let them then avail themselves of the present moment, and by one single well-timed precaution, baffle the designs of any party, who may at this instant be forging chains to enslave them.

The occasion which now offers itself, is that which an eminent French author (I trust, with more severity than truth) has observed to be the only one in which this nation, however

ever it may boast of its liberty, is legally entitled to enjoy it—a General Election. Let them so far profit by it, as to prevent in future every such sarcasm, by manifesting to the world, that they are not only entitled to enjoy the blessings of a free government, but dare also to assert its principles when doubted, and to vindicate them when violated. By such a conduct, they will entitle themselves to that truly enviable acknowledgment, the gratitude of those of their fellow citizens, whose lives, liberties, and property, are absolutely dependent on *their* ~~this~~ constitutional exercise of that invaluable privilege, the right of suffrage in the election of a representative, from which they are so unconstitutionally excluded.

F I N I S.

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